

Current Topics

The Great Illusion

The recruiting officers of every rank and of both sexes did not hesitate to tell the people during the past four years that this war, over which the Allies are still bickering, was to be—as far as the Entente Powers were concerned—the cleanest and the most ideal crusade ever known in the world. And in accordance with the ways of John Bullists it was a dangerous thing for any man to use his common sense during that period; and a still more dangerous thing for a man to tell the truth. Honest critics were either shut up metaphorically with an angry cry to the effect that they were seditious, or else they were shut up in reality by our Junkers, who were the loudest preachers of freedom. We denounced the enemy for suppressing free speech, and we did the same ourselves; we blamed him for driving men to fight, and we had Wanganui Barracks to our own credit: we shot Sheehy-Skeffington while we wept like waterfalls over the Poles and the Belgians. And at the back of all that there was a merry dance of profiteering going on. Government Ministers were not above having a finger in the pie. It was lawful even to trade with the enemy—for a consideration. And as a matter of fact a man of the fine old English name of Moritz Mond, after being publicly accused of dealings with the Germans in war time, became a Cabinet Minister. And thus went on the great, pure, disinterested crusade for which so many men were compelled to fight whether they were conscientious objectors or not, whether they belonged to a small nation which the champions of small nations were grinding under their heels or no. Many years ago Pope Leo XIII. wrote that the cause of the greatest social trouble was the fact that a small number of wealthy men have been able to lay upon the teeming masses of the laboring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself. And now that the crusade is over what has been done to break the fetters of the poor and to punish the rich slave-drivers? Has anything been done? Is the lot of the poor even as tolerable as it was before? Are the rich less dangerous or less powerful? In reply the editor of the *New Age* tells us that "the effect of the war has been to accelerate the pre-existing movement towards the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few." He proves his thesis by the following remarks:—

1. According to the income-tax returns the number of persons whose income has been raised above £5000 a year during the last twelve months is 573.

2. Ninety persons are registered as enjoying an annual income of over £100,000.

3. One fifteen-hundredth of the population receive annually one-tenth of the whole national income.

Thus the war which has left the nation poorer has left a few men richer. Side by side with Militarism for the poor existed State-protection for the profiteers, as a result of which Plutocracy is stronger and more merciless than ever at the end of this war which was to bring justice to all mankind and restore justice and equality to the earth. To us who have protested in vain against the hypocrisy which persecuted Ireland while calling on men—even on Irishmen—to die for Poland this comes as no surprise. But when the men who have been deceived find out what they have fought for and what sort of victory they have won what is going to happen? The other day Cecil Chesterton was killed in the war; but before he died he left a solemn warning. It was this: *The men who will come back from the war to find that they are not going to get fair play from the Plutocrats have been accustomed to the use of arms.* Will the Plutocrats heed the warning, or will it take another Reign of Terror to put the fear of God into them?

Our Own Brand of Prussianism

By Prussianism we have been taught that we are to understand a system of oppression of small nations, an assumption of a mission to possess and rule the whole earth, a contempt for treaties and promises, the destruction of cathedrals and unrestricted belligerency which takes heed of no conditions of age or sex. The press of the Empire has spent nearly four years in telling us over and over again how we ought to hate Prussianism because it stands for these abominable things. The press is right we ought to hate them. And if we ought to hate them in an enemy we ought to hate them a thousand times more in ourselves. There is a section of the press which is ready to bring out machine guns or at least to urge on Hooligans of various types to attack the man who will accuse ourselves of practising this awful thing that we declare so hateful in others. However our task is made easy by the fact that some of the papers so often quoted for our misled public as authorities on the Irish question—and therefore above suspicion!—are in themselves ample proof that Prussianism is rampant in our midst in the Empire. We needn't go back to Lord Rosebery's hint that our object in existence was to stamp the Anglo-Saxon character on the white race, or to the gentle request from the *London Times* that the Boer war should be hurried to an end by a policy of striking terror into non-combatants. We need not go back beyond the present war to find that we were advocating the very things we denounced in our foes. Papers like the *Globe* and the *Morning Post* seem to hate Germany for the reason that in her bid for pre-eminence she takes no account of our own claim to world supremacy. And the whole argument against Germany falls to pieces if we grant that we or any other people have any right to claim such supremacy. Might is right, is, we are told, a Prussian maxim, but it is also the maxim which underlies the arguments of the Jingoists and their organs. A book has recently been published called *Christian Imperialism*, and in it the author, who is not alone in his view, claims frankly that the British race has been stamped with the seal of divine approval and chosen of God for a high mission, in language which we are accustomed to ridicule as being a monopoly of the Kaiser. And as a consequence, we suppose, of this high mission the Imperialist who wrote the book in question asserts Britain's right to uphold a naval supremacy characterised by aggression and selfishness. Again, the *Saturday Review* advised our airmen to bomb Cologne Cathedral in retaliation for the destruction of Rheims, in other words to commit what we had ourselves very rightly denounced as not only a crime but an act of vandalism, and in the case of Cologne, one for which no military necessity could be alleged. Last, but not least, the *London Tablet*, the paper which fell so low as to publish without comment the lying attacks made by the creature Hughes on Dr. Mannix, permitted a correspondent to advocate in its columns a policy of "unrestricted belligerency," as if above all human things there were not for ever and under all circumstances the moral laws sanctioned by the God of all nations who is scourging a sinful people, and who will scourge them until there comes a change of heart that is yet far distant from us all. To all this an Irishman will add, What about the rights of small nations under British rule? What about promises made and broken to Ireland? What about the outrageous denial in Ireland of the principle we have laid down that the majority of a people must determine their own form of government? What about Lloyd George's admission that the Home Rule Bill should be put into force, not from any consideration for honor or fairness but under compulsion from America? What about the fact that in the committee appointed to draft the Bill we did not read the name of a single representative of the Irish people? Our governments, our press, our politicians are contradicting their own expressions day after day until the people have come to distrust everyone of them. And this fact, in connection with the connivance of our so-called statesmen at the profiteering that

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